

NPR COLLECT

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Two 20-year-old star track and field stars from Morocco are being groomed by University of Denver coach Edgar Lalpenieks to compete April 18-20 in the Kansas Relays at the University of Kansas in Lawrence.

Lalpenieks said Bouchaib el Naachi, leading sprinter of the Arabic world, will be ready to compete in the 100-yard dash, and he hoped Abdelghani Bellal, another outstanding performer, will be ready to try his luck in the grueling decathlon.

"During the past week," Coach Lalpenieks said Saturday (April 6), "Naachi has run the 100-yard dash in 9.6 seconds and the 220-yard run in 21.3 seconds."

He said the young sprinter will be one of the fastest men competing at the relays.

He said he hoped that Bellal also would be in shape for the decathlon at the Kansas meet. However, Bellal pulled a leg muscle soon after his arrival at DU in March and still is trying to get back in top physical shape.

The two Moroccan athletes, both physical education teachers in their native Casablanca, have found their coach American to be a hard task master.

"But that's what makes an athlete," said Naachi with a grin.

Both young men are in the United States at the University of Denver under a program sponsored by Sports International. They arrived in mid-March and will return to their native country in late May, according to the coach.

Through their DU coach the Moroccans are learning American methods of coaching and also physical education teaching approaches.

"They are smart fellows," Lalpenieks said. "They are doing very well. My boys have real respect for them."

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The DU coach, a native of Latvia, is an internationalist in the coaching profession. He taught physical education at Innsbruck University in Austria in 1944-45, was a ski instructor for the French Army in 1946-47, and before coming to the United States was head track coach for the Chilean Olympic team.

Although they are taking special classes in English, Raacki and Bellal are accompanied by a U. S. State Department interpreter. Through the interpreter they are being coached by Laipenleks, who speaks French only casually.

Both the visiting athletes, interviewed through their interpreter, said there are marked differences in training techniques at the University of Denver.

"The training here is much more intensive," Raacki said. "You run at full speed early."

At the University of Denver, the track squad, along with the Moroccan, works out seven days a week -- 2 to 4 p. m. on week days and from 10 a. m. until noon on Saturdays and Sundays. The coach stays with his track squad at each session.

In Morocco, the two athletes said, the training season is longer and a schedule for training is posted. The athletes often work out by themselves without the benefit of their coach.

Raacki and Bellal indicated they preferred the less intensive training schedule followed in Morocco and in France, but admitted that Laipenleks' system had its advantages.

Both praised the daily use of weight lifting at the University of Denver practice sessions.

"In Morocco," Bellal said, "one day a week is set aside for no weight lifting."

At DU, a special apparatus is used for weight lifting with the legs and feet. The weight bar is lifted by the athlete as he lies on his back on the floor. He pushes it up with the tips of his toes.

Both men said the exercise developed leg and ankle muscles.

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Also on the plus side, the two athletes agreed, was the superior American equipment. They were especially impressed with the training room and its equipment and the use of water in muscle therapy.

Bellal, whose specialty is pole vaulting, is learning new techniques because of the difference in poles. In Morocco, he used a steel pole in this event. In the United States a more flexible fiber-glass pole is used.

He has had to change his timing. Instead of placing his pole for the jump during the final step, he must now place the pole in position on the next to last step before launching himself.

Kacchi, under Laipenleks' direction, also is correcting his running posture. He said he had been running with his chest ~~and~~ back. But now he is ~~beginning~~ leaning forward from head to foot as he sprints from the starting blocks along the track to the finish line.

Bellal also is learning a new technique in throwing the javelin. Instead of throwing it side-arm, as in Europe, he now is throwing it ~~more~~ more over-hand, which he said minimizes the chances of an elbow injury.

Although Laipenleks ~~manages~~ and Kacchi both are eager for Bellal to try the decathlon at the Kansas Relays, the young athlete himself still was not sure he would be ~~in~~ in good enough condition.

"He has two weeks -- he should be ready," the coach said.

(Note: Suggest story after Kansas Relays when both will be able assess U. S. training methods better.)

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